EXCISE pursuant (1814)

December 7, 1978. B6

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Files

FROM: ARA/CAR - Richard McCoy

SUBJECT: Consular Officer Visits to Jonestown

1. SUMMARY:

I travelled to Jonestown to the Peoples Temple agricultural community on August ~~29~~ 30, 1977, January 11, 1978 and May 10, 1978. These visits were to perform both normal consular activities and to respond to inquiries from relatives of individuals who were at the community. In order to insure access to the farm I would inform the Peoples Temple before hand of my plans to visit. I would give them some but not all of the names of people that I wished to contact. I did not give out the names of those I had reason to believe had been abused in some way by the Temple so that I could determine for myself whether in fact the individual had been mistreated. I was concerned that if I did not give names in advance the Temple "would give me some excuse why the person was unavailable. However,

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I always saw every individual I wished to see and never noticed any signs of physical abuse. When I arrived at Jonestown the Peoples Temple administrative staff would assist me in locating persons usually by their loud speaker. When the individual would come to me, unless I knew them in advance, either because I had seem them on previous visits to the community or at the Consulate in Georgetown, I would ask them to produce their passport for identity. I would then move with them away from the central pavilion where I would then proceed to ask them the following questions: How are you? What are you doing? Are you being well treated? Do you wish to leave? Are you being held here against your will? Have you been mistreated in any way? What are your plans for the future? Have you heard from your family in the United States? Have you written your family in the United States? Are you satisfied with your present life in Jonestown? I did not ask all those interviewed the same questions. My questioning was based upon information contained in the letter from the concerned relative. However, the above questions are basically what were asked. I also

informed them that if they wished to leave we could do so immediately in the GOG official vehicle. In every instance, the interviewees replied that they were not held against their will or mistreated. While I was concerned whether the answers were genuine and the individuals had not been intimidated, there was simply no way that I could prove otherwise. Therefore, I reported what the individual said and my impressions of the conversation. I still find it difficult to believe that the visits were stage managed. I had free access anywhere I wished to go and I never thought I was being prevented from viewing certain areas. I always tried to use some excuse to break away from whomever was with me and approach a single member of the community to discuss his activities. I had hoped to see if I could determine a tenseness on the part of the individual to denote that his answers were forced. On no occasion did I ever have the impression that the answers were other than spontaneous.

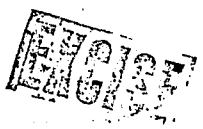
2. Details - First Visit to Jonestown

My first trip to the Peoples Temple Agricultural Community occurred between August 28 and August 30, 1977. The purpose of the trip was twofold; to acquaint myself with conditions at the Community, and to respond to a request from a relative that was concerned that a Temple member [redacted] was being held against her will. Up to this time the only unfavorable information that had been mentioned in connection with the Peoples Temple was a magazine article published by New West magazine. I had earlier met Jones in December, 1976 when he visited Guyana accompanied by Mervin Dymally then Lt. Governor of California. At the time of the trip I had very little knowledge of the Peoples Temple: its origin, structure, and purpose. I had only two other inquiries; one inquiring about children at Jonestown who had previously been wards of the court in California, and the other from a mother who was first concerned about her daughter. This lady later sent a telegram indicating she was no longer concerned about her daughter's welfare. Under these circumstances I had no particular reason to be overly suspicious of the organization or its intentions.

I traveled to Matthews Ridge on August 28 to meet with

government officials who had jurisdiction over the Jonestown community. Upon arrival I was informed by the Regional District Officer, Mr. Robert Wyatt, that a Peoples Temple member named [redacted] had left the Community and walked into Port Kaituma complaining of ill treatment at Jonestown. [redacted] had cuts on the upper part of his back. He had been transported from Port Kaituma to Matthews Ridge by GOG officials and was lodged at the local dispensary. I immediately arranged to visit [redacted] accompanied by a criminal investigation officer of the Guyanese Police to verify the facts of this case.

[redacted] in the interview denied that he WITH HEAVY TIMBERS, I STOOD THAT HIS CUTS CAME FROM LOCKS WAISTED had been mistreated and stated that he just ~~wished~~ Jim (Jones) to send him home since he was not cut out for that kind of life. [redacted] indicated that he was a stevedore from San Francisco who had a sister living in Palo Alto, California, but he could not give me the sister's full name or address. I informed him that I would arrange to have the Temple or the U.S. Government assist him in returning to California.



On August 30, I traveled first from Matthews Ridge to Port Kaituma where I met with the local District Officer, Mr. Norman Adams, who is responsible for the immediate area surrounding Jonestown. I discussed with Mr. Adams the general purpose of my visit and the results of my meeting with [redacted] Adams was relieved to hear that [redacted] had changed his story since he was very concerned about the allegations when they were first made. He promised to keep in touch with me about developments in the community.

Mr. Adams accompanied me into Jonestown. At Port Kaituma a young Guyanese university student who had asked for a ride back to Matthews Ridge also became part of the Group that went into Jonestown. We were met upon arrival by Jones and several members of his staff including [redacted] and others.

Jones was aware of the general purpose of my visit which was to se[redacted] However, he was unaware that I was to verify the presence of John Stoen at the camp. This request had been relayed to me the day before by telephone from Georgetown to Matthews Ridge.

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Jones began showing me around the community. First we saw what looked like a communal dining room where about 100 elderly black and white women were sitting singing spirituals. Jones immediately addressed the group, introduced me as the Consul, and asked whether they were happy and satisfied. Not surprisingly, they answered yes. We then entered what I assume was the administration office where there was a table size mock-up of the community as envisaged when it was completed. Jones indicated that he anticipated a community of about 1500 people or more. We then visited the clinic where I met the Jonestown doctor who informed me that he had finished his medical work at the University of California at Irvine. I also met [redacted] who identified herself as a paramedic.

We then visited a number of living quarters and the saw mill which at that moment was turning out siding for pre-fabricated housing as another crew prepared the house sites. Jones explained that they had made arrangements for married couples and single-sexed dorms. They took great pride in pointing out the facilities that were being erected for the elderly.

ENCLOSURE

Insterspersed with a running commentary of family accomplishments in building the Community, Jones continually made reference to what he termed were lies that had been appearing in the press about the Peoples Temple. He then took me to what was an extremely large hole that was the community's refuse dump. He said one of the accusations that had been made was that members had been forced to dig this hole as punishment. He indicated that the hole had been dug by a tractor with a backhoe. This explanation appeared reasonable since the sides of the hole were smooth which would indicate it had been dug out by mechanical means. However, I was aware that it could have been done just before I came.

We then went to lunch which was served with water from the Jonestown well. The lunch which consisted of rice, okra, and some ground meat was not very tasty but it was filling. Desert was cassava cake (Edible Cassava) which I did not eat. I mentioned the case of [redacted] who was in Matthews Ridge, Jones and his colleagues expressed surprise that [redacted] was there. They had clearly wondered what had happened to him. When I explained [redacted] request, Jones readily agreed and instructed his adopted son, Johnny, to gather up [redacted] effects that were left at the camp and help arrange [redacted] return to Georgetown where a ticket would be provided for his

return to the United States by the Peoples Temple.

After lunch Jones began to again speak at length about the "conspirac " against him by certain right wing forces in the United States and alluded to my visit as being a direct result of the lies that were being spread about the Peoples Temple. He men ioned that he had been shot at from the jungle. I asked whether they had any firearms to defend themselves or for hunting. Jones replied we have several shotguns for hunting. He again returned to this theme of a "conspiracy". He showed me legal documents about [redacted]

I told Jones that while I couldn't comment on these charges that he should expect that under normal circumstances many relatives of his members would be concerned about the well-being and welfare of their relatives in this remote distant part of Guyana that was unknown to them. He could expect that there would be future visits since I or another consular officer would have to visit Jonestown in response to requests through the Department of State that the Embassy conduct an official inquiry. I explained that this was normal State Department procedure and he would just have to get used

to it. He would have to understand that in my contacts with people here if they wished to leave they would be allowed to do so. At the same time I assured him that I would not be conducting a witch hunt but simply trying to assertain the facts. I reminded Jones that as American citizens they were entitled to their right to privacy but at the same time they must also understand that they were subject to Guyanese law and would have to abide by this law. I concluded that they should not construe my visit as hostile but simply one to determine the facts.

At this time I asked them to produce John Stoen along with his passport for identity purposes. This request caused some consternation. When asked why, I simply said that I had been asked by the State Department to verify if he was at Jonestown. They complied with the request but the mood changed from one of friendliness to one of wariness on the part of the Temple members.

I then requested to see [redacted] When she appeared with her passport, I then moved away from the group to an open area where we could speak without being overheard. I informed [redacted] of her family's concern that she was being held against her will. She replied that her family's

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impression was a mistake. I asked whether she had been in fact psychologically or physically intimidated by the Peoples Temple to remain in Jonestown. She then replied that she had not been neither psychologically or physically intimidated to remain in Jonestown. I reiterated my question adding that she could feel safe with me and that if she wished we could leave immediately in the presence of the Guyanese who accompanied me and that no one would stop her. [redacted] then said she did not wish to leave, she was not living in fear, and in fact stated that she was very happy with her new life as one of the teachers in the local school that had started in Jonestown. I again said are you sure? She smiled and said she was sure she did not wish to leave Jonestown. I believed [redacted] who appeared to be a mature young woman, was sincere in her response and as it did not appear that she would change her mind and the interview was then concluded.

Just before I left, Jones in a calculated afterthought asked if it were true that the Embassy had requested the Government of Guyana to expell the Peoples Temple from Guyana. I told him that no the statement was not true, that it was inconceivable that the U.S. Government would move against an entire American organization. We would however, request the Guyanese Government to return any

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individuals who had fled the U.S. to avoid criminal prosecution whether they were members of the Peoples Temple or not. I then departed Jonestown and returned to Matthews Ridge.

On August 30, I met with the Regional District Officer for a lengthy discussion of my impressions and experience at Jonestown. I told him I had not seen any illegal or unusual activity. Mr. Wyatt replied that he had not yet visited the community since he had taken up his post the previous June but he intended to visit there shortly to see for himself what was occurring.

I made arrangements for [redacted] to be picked up at the dispensary and brought to the airfield for the return flight to Georgetown. Later at the airfield I met [redacted] (the nurse) who was taking a child into Georgetown for medical treatment. She was accompanied by [redacted] I had a chance to have a long conversation with [redacted] while we were waiting for the airplane at which time she showed me the plans of the community to build a hospital. The plans were architectural drawings of fairly high quality. She told me she was going into Georgetown not only for medical treatment for the child but also to review these plans with Ministry of Health Officials in hopes that the Ministry would assist the community in procuring a particular type of lumber available in Guyana that was resistant to warping and termites.

When the plane arrived at Georgetown, [redacted] went their separate ways. I confirmed with the Chief of Immigration that [redacted] left Guyana for the United States by himself about two days later.

SECOND VISIT

On January 11, 1978 I again travelled to Jonestown this time by chartered airplane with [redacted] and Norman Adams, the District Officer from Port Kaituma who had been in Georgetown on business and who had agreed to accompany me on my visit. I earlier explained to Mr. Adams that I was going up to conduct inquires concerning the possibility of social security fraud and to investigate allegations that a number of Peoples Temple members were being held against their will. Mr. Adams arranged transportation for me from the airstrip in Port Kaituma into Jonestown and return. During the flight to Port Kaituma I had a chance to talk alone with [redacted]

I told [redacted] that her father had sent her a ticket for her to use if at sometime she should decide to leave the Temple. I explained that the ticket was in my safe and would remain there for an indefinte period of time. [redacted] just smiled and said she had no plans to leave Guyana or Jonestown at this time and wished her father would accept that. She said she loved her father but she had her own

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life to live and she was old enough to know what she was doing.

Since I had a large number of people to see on this trip, approaching 30, I did give the names of most of the social security recipients that I had to interview to the Temple along with one or two others to have them ready to interview so that I could complete my business the same day and return to Georgetown.

I first interviewed those people who I had to see on welfare inquires. I had the Temple call out the name of the individual on their loud speakers. Since I had a limited amount of time to talk with many individuals I did not have very much time to listen to one of Jones' monologues about harrassment and conspiracy. I established myself in the central pavilion, gave [redacted] a list of names to call the people in from wherever they were. For those who did not have their passports, [redacted] got the passports for them so that I could identify the individual. As the individuals came to me in the central pavilion, except in the case of one elderly lady we would move to an open area on the farthest side of the pavilion away from anyone in order to conduct the interview in private.

The elderly social security recipients some of which were infirm were interviewed at a picnic table in a corner of the pavilion. The members who were interviewd concerning the allegations that they were held against their will included: [redacted]

I also spoke with [redacted] concerning her granddaughte[redacted] All these individuals were asked if they were happy at Jonestown, whether they were being held against their will, I also asked what type of work they were engaged in, what their interests were, whether they had been physically asaulted or abused in any way and whether they wanted to leave with me.

In the case of [redacted] who was a young boy of 12 or 13, a relative had written that as punishment he had all his hair shaved off. I received this inquiry sometime in December 1977 so that at most the allegations might be three months old from the time relatives had heard of it. When I spoke to [redacted] he had an afro which would have taken him more than three months to grow.

I also presented letters from relatives to a number of people in Jonestown including [redacted]

[redacted] I then interviewed the social security recipients and at the same time personally handed them their checks. I also personally delivered most of the 78 checks I had brought that day. I took this opportunity to question many of the recipients about their life in Jonestown, plans to return to the United States, and whether they had signed away the rights of their checks to the Peoples Temple. Again in all cases the individuals responded that there had been no pressure on them to sign their checks over to the Temple and that they were free to donate as much as they wished. All of the elderly people were neatly dressed and expressed a strong satisfaction with their life at Jonestown. One man remarked how much he enjoyed the fishing in nearby steams, others talked of working in the children's nursery, and growing flowers and vegetables. Several spoke of being able to receive their checks without the fear of being mugged. I chatted for quite sometime with the elderly people in the hopes that I could see some sense of fear or strain on their part. At no time did I have a feeling that these people were in any way apprehensive about talking to me. In fact the only hostility during the visit came when I tried to pass letters to individuals from relatives and when I attempted to get Privacy Act releases so that I could inform relatives of the results of the interviews.

At all times during this particular visit life seemed to be continuing; people working in the fields, the saw mill and the machine shop. I just could not sense any body acting abnormally.

On two separate occasions I excused myself to go to the bathroom in order to be able to approach members of the community to see if I could take them unawares by asking them if they were being held against their will here, and were they aware of their rights as American citizens in Guyana to request the protection of the Guyanese Government. These spontaneous contacts appeared to disconcert Jones somewhat but on no occasion did I get an impression from the people that the replies were rehearsed.

Jones, when I was leaving the community, said he hoped I was satisfied that all these allegations were false and I said that on the basis of my investigation they appeared to be since no one wanted to leave with me. However, I pointed out to him that until he opened up the community for the relatives of Temple members to come and visit, he could expect the allegations to continue and therefore he could expect consular officers to continue to make trips to the community to check out these accusations. On that note the visit concluded.

I returned to Georgetown with Mr. Adams whose business in the capital had not been completed. We brought Terri Jones (Jim JOnes daughter in-law) and her baby back to Georgetown with us.

On the basis of my observations on this trip, I thought it was improbable that people were being held against their will. I did feel that Temple members may have been intimidated from attempting to leave the community because of the difficulty in arranging transportation Georgetown from such a remote location and of course, Jones may have been exerting strong influence on members to stay.

I could not believe that any member especially young adult members in their 20's and 30's, if they really wished to leave could not simply find the opportunity to fade into the jungle and make their way to Matthews Ridge or Port Kaituma and request onward assistance. I always made it a point to mention to everyone that I was always available in Georgetown to help them in way I could hoping that they would remember this and orce in contact with Guyanese authorities would request assistance from me.

I emphasized to Norman Adams and his immediate Superior Robert Wyatt that should any mem'er of Jonestown manage go get to Matthews Ridge or Port Kaituma to help them arrange

onward transportation and notify me so that I could arrange to meet them and help them to return to the United States. However, as my report to the Department of this trip indicated I had not developed any information that would substantiate charges that people were being held against their will.

THIRD VISIT

On May 10, 1978 I travelled to Jonestown accompanied by Mr. Richard Dwyer, Deputy Chief of Mission and [redacted] member of the Peoples Temple staff. Mr. Dwyer took a camera with him in order to be able to take extensive photos of the community. The trip was made by charter aircraft from Georgetown to Port Kaituma where a government vehicle met us upon arrival.

In Port Kaituma Mr. Dwyer and I went to meet the new District Officer, Mr. Herb Thomas. I discussed with Mr. Thomas the delay in registering recent births and deaths that had occurred in Jonestown. I explained to him that it was improtant that these procedures be regularized so that the reporting of births and deaths could be promptly completed. I asked him also his impressions of Jonestown. and he gave a noncommital response. I asked had he observed or heard anything which would be considered unusual and he replied no. I asked him if he could come to the community with Mr. Dwyer and myself in order to resolve these questions

of local registry services. He said he could not at this moment, but would do so later in the day. Mr. Dwyer and I then excused ourselves and continued our journey to the community.

Upon our arrival, I introduced Mr. Dwyer to Jones and other members of his staff. I then left this group and asked a member of the staff, who I think was [redacted] to ask the people on a list that I had prepared to come to the central pavilion where I would meet with them. I interviewed the following people outside of the central pavilion: [redacted]

While I did not ask all of them the same questions, in all cases I did ask them whether they were being held against their will or whether they had suffered any mistreatment. They all replied no and stated they did not wish to leave Jonestown. In the case of the [redacted] I asked them whether they had received messages that I had passed through the Peoples Temple Office in Georgetown. They replied yes they had received the messages. I emphasized to the [redacted] boys the importance of responding to their father's request that he had made to see them, ever if it meant traveling to Georgetown. I asked [redacted] to contact her mother in the near future since she was concerned about her health and welfare. After speaking with these people, I then met with approximately 20 to 30 members of the community who were the parents of recently newborn children.

At this point, I assisted them in filling out the necessary documents in order to register the births of the children so that they could be documented as American citizens. Several of the parents were unmarried I told them I could not complete the formalities and instructed them to come to the Consulate in Georgetown to accomplish this. There are other cases where I simply did not have sufficient forms and these individuals were also asked to come to Georgetown to finish the paperwork. I also discussed a social security case with [redacted]

I then met with Paula Adams and several other members of the Temple who had applied for Guyanese citizenship in order to legally permit the Temple to be registered as a cooperative agricultural community. I informed these individuals that if they pursued their plans to acquire Guyanese nationality, they ran a strong risk of losing their American citizenship. They all claimed that this was not their desire but that under Guyanese law a certain number of the board of directors had to be Guyanese citizens. I suggested to them that they may wish to consider bringing in a number of Guyanese, such as their local attorney or some other interested individual to serve on the board, thus it would not be necessary for them to received Guyanese citizenship. They agreed to consider this suggestion.

During all of my activities Mr. Dwyer toured the site and met with Jones and members of his staff. Just before leaving, [redacted] showed me the new children's library that had been set up. We then departed the community to return to Georgetown. The DCM and I had decided that after take off we would arrange to have the plane do a slow circle over the community so that he could take pictures at an angle to see if we could spot any roadway or buildings constructed at the periphery of the community that would be covered by the jungle from a plane flying directly overhead.

After the films were developed it was apparent from a review of the photos that there did not appear to be any such buildings. My general impression again was that the community was thriving. Additional work had been accomplished, more land had been cleared and more buildings erected. Possibly because of Dwyer's visit, lunch this time was roast pork, rice and vegetables. The best meal that I had in my three visits.